

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 069045 TOSEC 030053

FOL RPT PARIS 09088 ACTION SECSTATE INFO BORDEAUX LYON
MARSEILLE NICE STRASBOURG 28 MAR 77 QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 09088

DEPARTMENT PASS SECRETARY'S PARTY

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR PINT FR

SUBJECT: BARRE GOVERNMENT RESIGNS

1. SUMMARY: IN A FIFTEEN MINUTE NATIONALLY
TELEVISED SPEECH, PRESIDENT GISCARD ANNOUNCED THE
RESIGNATION OF THE RAYMOND BARRE GOVERNMENT AND AT THE
SAME TIME ASKED BARRE TO REMAIN AS PRIME MINISTER TO
FORM A NEW CABINET "FREE OF POLITICAL PARTIES" (DEGAGE
DES PARTIS POLITIQUES). THE PRIMARY GOALS OF THE NEW
GOVERNMENT WILL BE TO CONTINUE THE PLAN OF ECONOMIC
RECOVERY AND TO FORMULATE AN "ACTION PROGRAM" CONCEN-
TRATING ON IMPROVING THE LOT OF FAMILIES, THE AGED, AND
INCREASING THE NUMBER OF JOBS FOR YOUTH. THE PROGRAM
WILL LATER BE PRESENTED TO PARLIAMENT FOR APPROVAL.
GISCARD CALLED FOR UNIFICATION OF THE MAJORITY
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PARTIES AROUND THIS PROGRAM AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE
COMMON PROGRAM OF THE LEFT. HE ALSO CONFIRMED THAT
LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS WILL NOT BE HELD BEFORE MARCH
1978.

2. IN A BRIEF TELEVISED SPEECH GISCARD CONFIRMED
POST-ELECTION EXPECTATIONS OF A CABINET SHUFFLE BY

ANNOUNCING THE RESIGNATION OF THE BARRE GOVERNMENT, SAYING THAT HE HAD ASKED BARRE TO STAY ON AS PRIME MINISTER CHARGED WITH FORMING A SMALL GOVERNMENT (LESS THAN 15 MINISTERS) WHICH WOULD FUNCTION "ABOVE PARTIES."

3. IN HIS FIRST PUBLIC ADDRESS SINCE THE LEFT MUNICIPAL ELECTION VICTORY, GISCARD ANNOUNCED THAT HE HAD "RECEIVED THE MESSAGE" OF THE ELECTORATE, THAT MESSAGE BEING THAT THE FRENCH WANT CHANGE. HOWEVER, CALLING A VOTE FOR THE LEFT A "DANGEROUS CHOICE," HE NOTED THAT THE LEFT MUNICIPAL VICTORIES HAD NOT BEEN GREETED WITH WIDESPREAD SATISFACTION. FRANCE, HE SAID, REMAINS A DIVIDED COUNTRY, SPLIT INTO MAJORITY AND OPPOSITION CAMPS, A DIVISION WHICH HE REFUSES TO ACCEPT. VGE WENT ON TO NOTE THAT DIVISIONS WITHIN THE MAJORITY HAD CONTRIBUTED TO THIS ELECTORAL DEFEAT, AND THAT THE CHANGE OF A FEW THOUSAND VOTES IN CERTAIN AREAS WOULD HAVE GIVEN THE VICTORY TO THE MAJORITY. IN ORDER TO RECOUP THESE LOST VOTES AND TO WIN IN 1978, THE MAJORITY MUST UNITE. UNDERSCORING THE ELEMENTS THAT UNITE THE MAJORITY (FAITH IN FIFTH REPUBLIC INSTITUTIONS, THE UNDERLYING DYNAMISM OF THE ECONOMY, DESIRE FOR SOCIAL REFORMS, AND THE IDEA OF THE FRENCH ROLE IN THE WEST) HE CALLED FOR THE CREATION OF A MAJORITY PACT WHICH WOULD HAVE AS ITS RALLYING POINT AN ACTION PROGRAM AIMED AT ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND A CONCRETE SET OF SOCIAL REFORMS. THE PROGRAM WOULD BE, GISCARD NOTED, PRESENTED TO CONFIDENTIAL

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PARLIAMENT FOR APPROVAL.

4. COMMENT: IN CALLING FOR BARRE TO FORM A NEW GOVERNMENT, GISCARD HAS PLAYED HIS TRUMP CARD BY ATTACHING HIMSELF TO THE COATTAILS OF HIS POPULAR AND RESPECTED PRIME MINISTER. BARRE'S NEW "FREE OF PARTIES" GOVERNMENT WILL ALSO CONTINUE GISCARD'S THEME OF REMAINING ABOVE THE POLITICAL BATTLE, THUS ALLOWING HIM TO SPEAK FOR ALL OF FRANCE--MAJORITY AND OPPOSITION ALIKE. SUCH A GOVERNMENT WILL PROBABLY SEE THE DEPARTURE OF BARRE'S MOST POLITICIZED AND SENIOR MINISTERS, NOTABLY PONIATOWSKI, GUICHARD AND LECANUET, WHILE OTHERS LESS POLITICIZED SUCH AS FOREIGN MINISTER, DE GUIRINGAUD AND DEFENSE MINISTER BOURGES MIGHT REMAIN.

5. GISCARD'S SPEECH REPRESENTS A MAJOR GAMBLE IN THAT IT ADMITS AND EVEN INSTITUTIONALIZES THE DISAPPEARANCE OF HIS POLITICAL BASE. IT FURTHER LEAVES

THE PRESIDENT WITH NO VISIBLE MEANS OF BUILDING A NEW CONSTITUENCY, EXCEPT INDIRECTLY THROUGH THE EFFORTS OF HIS PRIME MINISTER. GISCARD THUS HAS TURNED HIS BACK ON POLITICS, IS ONCE AGAIN SEEKING TO RISE ABOVE THE INTERPLAY OF PARTIES AND MAY HAVE THUS CONCEDED A MAJOR PART OF HIS MANEUVERING ROOM TO THE GAULLISTS AND THEIR UNITED LEFT OPPONENTS. WILL IT WORK? IT IS NOT AT ALL CLEAR THAT THE FRENCH WILL ACCEPT GISCARD'S SOLUTION--THE PUBLIC HAS TO BUY HIS REFORMS AT LEAST WELL ENOUGH TO REPAY THE POLITICAL COSTS OF THE OPERATION.

6. GISCARD DID NOT SPECIFY THE GOALS OF THIS MAJORITY "ACTION PROGRAM FOR TWELVE MONTHS," NOR IS IT CLEAR WHETHER HE HAD PREVIOUSLY DISCUSSED SUCH A PROGRAM WITH MAJORITY PARTY LEADERS. IN THE END, GISCARD HAS AGAIN POSED THE "CHOICE OF SOCIETY" WHICH WILL BE THE CONFIDENTIAL

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MAJORITY THEME FOR THE LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. A MAJOR TASK FOR THE NEW BARRE GOVERNMENT WILL BE THE CREATION OF A REFORMIST PROGRAM STRONG ENOUGH TO CHALLENGE THE COMMON PROGRAM. THIS EFFORT COULD WELL BE THE LAST SHOT FOR THE MAJORITY. IF IT FAILS, THE ALTERNATIVE IS MORE SLOGANEERING, A TACTIC WHICH FAILED MISERABLY IN THE MUNICIPALS. GAMMON

UNQUOTE CHRISTOPHER

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